

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

LISTING OF CLAIMS:

1. (currently amended) ~~Method~~ A method for the manufacture of thermoformed bodies, according to which a sheet (15) of thermoformable plastic material is heated to a plasticizing temperature, subsequently causing it to adhere to a shaping surface of a mold (11), comprising the steps of:

- heating the sheet material (15) to a plasticizing temperature, maintaining it in a suspended condition, held along its peripheral edges;

- causing an enrichment of material by pre-shaping the heated sheet (15) of plastic material, at least partially conforming it to a shaping of the mold (11), by performing relative movements of at least part of the peripheral edges of the sheet (15);

- bringing the heated and pre-shaped sheet (15) into an aligned condition with the mold (11), and vacuum forming said pre-shaped sheet (15), making it adhere to the shaping surface of the mold (11).

2. (currently amended) ~~Method~~ A method for the manufacture of thermoformed bodies according to claim 1,

~~characterised by wherein~~ carrying out an enrichment step of the plastic sheet material (15), causing the formation of a sag (15A) in a controlled way, during the heating step.

3. (currently amended) ~~Method A method~~ for the manufacture of thermoformed bodies according to claim 2, ~~characterised by wherein~~ forming, by gravity, a downwardly facing sag (15A), during the heating step.

4. (currently amended) ~~Method A method~~ for the manufacture of thermoformed bodies according to claim 2, ~~characterised by wherein~~ forming an upwardly facing sag (15A), pneumatically supporting the sheet of material during the heating step.

5. (currently amended) ~~Method A method~~ for the manufacture of thermoformed bodies according to claim 1, ~~characterised by wherein~~ pre-shaping the sheet material (15), after the enrichment step, by a shaping plug.

6. (currently amended) ~~Method A method~~ for the manufacture of thermoformed bodies according to claim 1, ~~characterised by wherein~~ holding the sheet material 15 along the peripheral edges by a variable geometry clamping frame (14) comprising articulated and/or longitudinally sliding frame

portions (14A, 14B; 14C, 14D, 14E), and causing an enrichment of the sheet material (15) by a relative movement between the frame portions (14A, 14B; 14C, 14D, 14E) of the clamping frame (14).

7. (currently amended) ~~Method~~ A method for the manufacture of thermoformed bodies according to claim 1, ~~characterised by wherein~~ carrying out the enrichment step of the heated sheet material (15), by a combination of sliding and/or rotational movements for approaching, raising and/or lowering the edges of the plastic sheet (15).

8. (currently amended) ~~Apparatus~~ An apparatus for the manufacture of thermoformed bodies, from a sheet of plastic material (15), comprising:

- a thermoforming mold (11) having a sheet shaping surface (12);

- a movable sheet clamping frame (14) for holding the sheet (15), said clamping frame (14) peripherally extending around the mold (11)[[, and]];

- clamping means (23, 26) for gripping the peripheral edges of the sheet (15) along at least part of the sides of the clamping frame (14);

- ~~the apparatus also comprises~~ support means (16) for supporting the clamping frame (14), said support means (16) being positioned and conformed to move the clamping frame (14) between a

raised and a lowered position with respect to the mold (11);

- and in which the clamping frame (14) has a geometrically variable shape providing at least a first and a second frame portion (14A, 14B; 14C, 14D, 14E), movable in relation to each other; and

- control means being operatively connected to said movable frame portions (14B; 14D), to selectively vary their disposition in conformity with the shaping surface (12) of the mold (11).

9. (currently amended) ~~Apparatus~~ The apparatus according to claim 8, ~~characterised in that wherein~~ the variable geometry clamping frame (14) comprises clamping means (23, 26) for gripping the plastic sheet (15) along at least part of the peripheral edges.

10. (currently amended) ~~Apparatus~~ The apparatus according to claim 9, ~~characterised in that wherein~~ the clamping means (23) for gripping the plastic sheet (15), are of mechanical type.

11. (currently amended) ~~Apparatus~~ The apparatus according to claim 9, ~~characterised in that wherein~~ the clamping means (26) for gripping the plastic sheet (15) are of vacuum operated type.

12. (currently amended) ~~Apparatus~~ The apparatus according to claim 8, ~~characterised in that wherein~~ the variable geometry frame (14) for holding the plastic sheet (15), comprises slidable and/or pivotally connected frame portions (14A, 14B; 14C, 14D, 14E) disposable on a same plane.

13. (currently amended) ~~Apparatus~~ The apparatus according to claim 11, ~~characterised in that wherein~~ said vacuum-operated clamping means comprise at least one top open slot (27) along a front side of the clamping frame (14), said slot (27) being connected to a manifold (29) by a plurality of air suction holes (30).

14. (currently amended) ~~Apparatus~~ The apparatus according to claim 8, ~~characterised in that wherein~~ the variable geometry clamping frame (14) has peripheral edges provided with longitudinal slots (27) connectable to an air suction source.

15. (currently amended) ~~Apparatus~~ The apparatus according to claim 8, ~~characterised in that wherein~~ the variable geometry clamping frame conforms to the geometrical pattern of the peripheral edges of the mold (11).

16. (currently amended) ~~Apparatus~~ The apparatus according to claim 13, ~~characterised in that~~ wherein the variable geometry clamping frame (14) comprises a first and a second top-open suction slots parallelely extending along opposite sides, and in that a bar (31) having a smaller width than the slots (27) is provided slightly spaced apart and above the bottom wall of each slot, said bar (31) defining together with said bottom wall a narrow air flow passage communicating with said air suction holes (30).